

MAJOR-LEAGUE MEMORIAL

By Emily Sweeney, Globe Staff

A major league reconstruction project is taking shape along Boston's Esplanade, as worn-out athletic fields are being renovated in honor of a young Red Sox fan.

A patch of fields near the Longfellow Bridge will become Teddy Ebersol's Red Sox Fields at Lederman Park. The \$1.8 million renovation, funded mainly through private donations, is being done in memory of Teddy Ebersol, a 14-year-old member of Red Sox Nation who died in a plane crash last November.

Landscape architecture firm Geller DeVellis Inc. reconfigured the park's layout. The site has been fenced off and heavy equipment has rolled in. The topsoil has been stripped away. The old bases, benches, backstops, and tennis courts have been removed, and drainage pipes will soon be installed.

The park will be home to three new baseball and softball diamonds, one T-ball diamond, and up to five soccer fields, said Corbie Kump, spokeswoman for the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation.

The new complex is being built on state-owned land that was originally named after Melvin Lederman, a Vietnam veteran who died in 1969. The existing fields, which date back to 1951, are currently used by the Hill House, a nonprofit organization that runs youth recreation programs at the park. Every year, thousands of athletes use the fields for soccer, baseball, softball, and other outdoor sports. The wear and tear had taken a toll.

The fields "were a wreck," said Patrick Maguire, head of Geller Sport, the athletic facility design division of Geller DeVellis Inc. "In the springtime, after it rained, some of the fields were unusable. Entire fields would be under water."

By taking out the tennis courts and moving an adult softball diamond to the south, there will be enough space for a fourth field. The plans also call for grading the flat playing surfaces to allow storm water to flow into a drainage system, instead of collecting in huge puddles that have plagued the fields for years.

A state-of-the-art lighting system has been proposed for two of the larger fields. The design will keep glare to a minimum, for the sake of the park's neighbors. Other improvements include a new irrigation system, water fountains, portable bleachers, and a manual scoreboard inspired by the one on the Green Monster at Fenway Park.

A groundbreaking ceremony was held in June. It was a tribute to Teddy, the son of NBC Universal Sports chairman Dick Ebersol and actress Susan Saint James.

The field rehabilitation project was initiated by Red Sox chairman Tom Werner, a friend of the Ebersol family, who live in Connecticut.

"Tom wanted to do something to commemorate [Teddy's] love for the Red Sox, and help kids of all ages, and kids at heart," said Meg Vaillancourt, executive director of the Red Sox Foundation.

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The fields will feature a granite bench engraved with Teddy Ebersol's name, along with "Curse Reversed 2004." Lying on the bench will be a bronzed baseball glove, the same kind Teddy used.

"It will look like he's gone to play on some other field," said Vaillancourt, who envisions hitters rubbing the glove for good luck before going to bat.

The project is a public-private effort including the state's Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, the Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Esplanade Association, Hill House, and the Red Sox Foundation. The state provided \$175,000 through its Office of Public Private Partnerships, and the rest is coming from private donations, said Kump.

For such a large public works project, the state sees this as a "precedent-setting partnership," said Kump. "This one of the biggest [partnerships] in terms of money contributed by partners."

Joseph Geller, president of Geller DeVellis, is pleased that the field redesign is underway.

"It's very exciting . . . and it's very emotional. Teddy was quite the kid," said Geller.

The project also illustrates a trend, especially during tight fiscal times.

"We're seeing more public-private partnerships," said Geller. "We've found that, in government, a lot of recreation and athletic funding gets cut first. . . . But there are a lot of people out in the community who are stepping up."

So far the Red Sox Foundation and the project partners have raised more than \$1.5 million for the renovations. They will continue to raise money to help pay for the field's maintenance, Vaillancourt said.

Teddy Ebersol's Red Sox Fields at Lederman Park are expected to be fully functional by summer 2006. An opening celebration is planned for April 2006. For information on how to donate to the project, visit www.redsoxfoundation.org.

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